

## THEN LIVE TO USE IT

By Greta Bardet

Old Mary never spent any of her money, so it must be in this room, Annie thought. And Annie could use that money . . .

**A**NNIE'S flushed, bloated face shone with anticipation while she searched the dirty room. The money was sure to be hidden somewhere among the filth, rags and collection of junk. It sent her heart pounding every time she wondered as to how much Dirty Mary might have hidden here among the trash. Her face screwed up with hypocritical distaste as she shoved fat fingers through a pile of foul rags.

Mary sure earned her name, Annie thought with self-righteous disgust, but that did not keep her from feeling through every inch of the slime. A cockroach scrambled across her hand unnoticed, for her mind was occupied with finding the money before Mary returned.

She had known Mary Mawson for a long time now. In fact she had cultivated the friendship. How many nights had she sat with the old crone, drinking rot-gut, trying to get her drunk enough to tell her where the money was hidden. But somehow it was always Annie who got drunk first. That damned hag thrived on the stuff; she could drink half a dozen cronies under the table and walk off with the bottle.

And since Annie didn't get anywhere, she finally made up her mind to tackle the affair in another manner. She was through making up to the hag, tired of feeding her liquor, tired of being nice. She wanted that money and nothing was going to stop her!

Annie had an idea the sum of money would be large. Mary never spent a cent. Every day she would leave her hovel at the crack of dawn, with that burlap bag slung over her shoulder. All day long she would trek through the city, hunt through garbage cans, ash barrels, waste paper boxes, through alleys . . . everywhere! She'd go about her work singing, or swearing, or muttering to herself, depending upon how she felt. And no matter how she felt, she looked a sight!

Whenever she found a dress, it went on right over the others she wore. She'd wear at least three hats at one time. She looked so poverty-stricken that the sympathy of passersby were easily aroused,

and coins would often be dropped into her grimy hands.

For years the old scarecrow had gotten money every day, and on cold and rainy days, the coins easily doubled or tripled in amount. Then there was the selling of the junk she found. Surely in her perambulations through the city she would often come across valuable things. She had hinted that upon occasion she rolled drunks, and sometimes found pocketbooks and wallets. More than that Mary would never reveal. It was only as she said it, in that crazy way of hers, with her eyes gleaming with satisfaction, that Annie knew her findings must have been large.



Here in this cellar room beneath the stairs, in this room of filth and stink, that money must be hidden. And Annie continued her search through the various drawers of the broken, lopsided furniture. She searched through the straw and newspapers that was Mary's bed. Through rags, through papers, through everything, inside and out, she shoved her hands, poked her fingers, but found nothing.

In desperation, since she was nervously

conscious of the close of day which would bring Mary back, Annie rummaged through everything all over again. But not a single coin, bill, or anything of value turned up.

Disappointment sagged through her. Irritation sharpened the ugly lines of her face as she stood there, her fists dug in the fatness of her waist, and knew she had to face the inevitable fact. If the money was not here in the room, it could only be in one other place—on Mary's person.

It was logical; and Annie had guessed from the beginning it would be on Mary anyhow. She had searched the room so thoroughly, just to make certain that the money was not here. It meant, then, that the money went wherever Mary went, sewed perhaps in one of those many underdresses. And that meant . . .

Annie wanted that money! She was determined to have it, no matter what the cost. She vaguely realized she was young no longer. Being ugly in the bargain made it difficult to make the man she loved notice her, not to talk of his falling for her. She was crazy about Joe Thompson who hung around Mick's Poolroom Parlor all the time. There was only one way to make that guy and keep him . . . with money! If there was enough of it, who knows? He might even get to marry her. She'd hook him, one way or the other. All she needed was money and a couple of gladrags.

**T**HE money being on the old woman's person, made it a little more difficult. But only just a little! Annie was quite ready to take a long chance. She had little imagination, and like all criminals, the possibility and consequences of being caught never occurred to her.

She'd just have to kill Dirty Mary, but what the hell?

Then she heard Mary's off-key singing; the shuffle of her feet as she lumbered down the basement stairs. The way she sang and hee-heed to herself told Annie that it had been a lucky day.

She went over to the table where lay the heavy hammer she had brought along for just this eventuality. She wrapped her fat fingers around the handle, stepped back next to the door, pressed against the wall, and waited.

The shuffle came closer; Mary began to sing a spiritual, but it broke off as a spasm of coughing seized her. The door opened, and in crept the ragged figure, bent over with coughing.

The open door hid Annie from her view. She dumped the burlap bag on the floor, and straightened, while the door slowly shut behind her.

Annie waited a moment, weighing the hammer in her hand, getting just the right grip around the handle. Then, with fired eyes, her face distorting with killer's lust, she raised the hammer and came for the defenseless crone.

The aged creature must have heard her, for she spun around with much more agility than her crippled body warranted. She seemed to take in the situation instantly. Her eyes went wild, and she put up her hands to ward off the blow. But too late. Annie brought the hammer down sharply, with all her strength. It embedded itself in the old woman's skull.

With a double-toned shriek that sounded more like the yelp of a canine, she sank to the floor. Screaming, her hands went over her head, as though trying to plug up the blood that fountained from the wound. Annie brought the hammer down again; the screams choked off; Mary rolled over on her back, and lay still.

Annie straightened, filled her lungs with air, while she wiped the sweat from her brow with her arm. She looked down, saw that the woman was dead, and dropped the hammer. She got down on her hands and knees, and got to work on the filth that was Dirty Mary's wearing apparel.

Cold-bloodedly, without compunction, she ripped off the first dress, examined it minutely, from seam to seam, searching for signs of sewed up money. But there was nothing but dirt. Satisfied that it concealed nothing, she tore off the next dress. And the next.

Surely the next one! It had to be someplace! Her searching fingers began to tremble, as her eyes filled with worry. A cold fear closed around her heart, not fear of having slain the woman, but fear of not finding that money.

Only one dress now covered the incredibly fleshless bones of the dead woman. Only one dress. She was almost afraid to touch it, for fear her crime was in vain.

Then with a lunge, half anger, half anxiety, she clawed her hands around the last dress, and ripped it away. Nothing!

With a cry of outraged wrath, she sprang up, flung the dress to her feet, then got down on her knees again, and re-searched every bit of the vermin infested clothes.

She ironed, pressed, flattened, patted every inch of the cloth against the stone floor—nothing!

Wild anger charged through her as she got to her feet. Then with bewildering swiftness things began to happen. Behind her the door flew open, and policemen charged into the room with drawn guns. Panic seized her, she tried to force her way through, but her efforts were in vain.

Mary's screams had attracted a child playing at the top of the cellar stairs. He had called his mother, who had crept halfway down the cellar stairs, only to rush up again and call the police.

In her cell, sometimes later, the lawyer who had been appointed to defend her, told her why she had not found the money. Mary had been wise enough to bank it. She had accumulated a little over \$5,000 in cash.

“So what!” Annie cried bitterly. “It ain’t gonna do me no good now.”

The lawyer smiled. “That’s true. It isn’t going to do you any good. Y’know the autopsy showed that Mary Mawson had cancer of the lung. She wouldn’t have lived long. Not longer than a few weeks.”

“Ain’t that too bad!”

“Yes it is rather. She must have thought you were her friend. You visited her, drank with her. She liked you, Annie.”

“So what?”

“Oh nothing. Thought you’d like to know she left a will, leaving all her money to you.”

THE END